

The Soldier Boy

A Book of War Gains

By C. Lewis Hind



Class 76-2

Book 1-2

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THE SOLDIER-BOY

BY

C. LEWIS HIND



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To

MY WIFE

(SHE KNOWS WHY)

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The Soldier-Boy

CHAPTER I

THE SOLDIER-BOY

THE Soldier-Boy is nineteen. He is beginning. Let him be nameless until he returns, bringing his sheaves with him.

The Soldier-Saint died a martyr's death more than 1600 years ago, yet he moves still. England's St. George lives immortal in the great chronicle of history; lives a dazzling figure in painting and sculpture and in the inner memory, where things not seen—are seen. Close the eyes and visualise this unpainted picture—"once, in the history of our land, the cross of St. George, red on a white ground, was worn as a badge over the armour by every English soldier."

To-day, when the bugles blow and the men swing down the street, I seem to see that badge of the patron saint of chivalry and of England floating in light on the khaki uniforms, presaging victory, because our cause is right, and our army stands for all that St. George means. I seem to see that badge flashing from the breast of the Soldier-Boy, as he crouches in the trenches on this the eve of St. George's Day, England's Day, and I send a message to him from Carlyle—this: "Thou art not alone if thou have faith. There is a communion of saints, unseen, yet not unreal, accompanying and, brotherlike, embracing thee, so thou be worthy." I should not be surprised if he wears beneath his khaki jacket, hidden from view, but very near to him, that red cross on a white ground. Soldier-Boy, thou art not alone! Thou art kin to St. George!"

We spent a day together, the Soldier-Boy and I, before he went out to the front. "I shall be in the trenches on St. George's Day,"

he said gleefully, and on that great name we dwelt, talking of St. George, opening books, reading aloud, repeating the strange, inspiring stories of his appearance during the Crusades, and elsewhere when men were fighting for the Right, aiding all who had accepted the spiritual idea of this soldier of Christ—"patron of chivalry, emblem of victory and civility, and the pride of the best blood of the modern world."

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We ignored all the false stories that have gathered around St. George, finding him heroic and beyond reproach, the peerless soldier whose name and ensign Edward III. chose as the inspiration of the most noble order of knighthood in Europe. And as we talked, fashioning and reverencing our ideal, I hoping, ay, knowing, that the Soldier-Boy would carry that ideal with him to Flanders, suddenly he addressed to me the natural question: "I wonder what St. George was like?"

I answered: "Almost every artist of importance has given us his version of St. George. The dragon is usually a failure, often comic, for it is impossible to portray in paint or marble the undying beast that St. George sets forth, again and again, through the centuries, to re-destroy. England, at this moment, is destroying him anew, and the spirit of St. George is watching and inspiring England. If you were to ask me which is the ideal figure in art of St. George I would answer at once—that by Donatello."

The Soldier-Boy's face (he is not learned in art) was blank.

"Donatello," I said, "was one of the great early lights of sculpture. Born in Florence in 1386, he produced works that have never been surpassed in marvellous fusion of the ideal and the real, and among his triumphs was his statue of St. George, which he carved for the Guild of Armourers. It was placed in a niche of the Church of Or San Michele in Florence in 1416. There it should have

remained for ever in the tabernacle designed by Donatello, but in 1890 some busybody removed it to the Bargello Museum."

"And you have seen it?" said the Soldier-Boy.

"Yes. Some day we will see it together. Meanwhile why not go now, at once, to the South Kensington Museum, where there is a good cast of Donatello's *St. George*?"

The Hall of Casts is rather an eerie place on a dim afternoon. The Present is dominated by the Past. As we wander among these dusty, crowded masterpieces, the mighty records of art assail us, and we seem to be the last of the living, entombed among the memorials of the great dead. The Soldier-Boy was silent, a little awe-struck, until I indicated to him Donatello's *St. George* standing between a cast of *The Shrine of St. Peter, Martyr*, in Milan, and the *Pulpit of the Baptistery* in Pisa. He looked, he stared, and uttered a long-drawn out "Ah—h."

St. George stands watchful in supple ar-

mour, feet apart, ready to spring forward. His cloak tied at the neck, falls over his shoulders to his ankles; his hands touch, lightly but firmly, his great shield, resting on the ground and reaching to his waist; his face has the self-reliant, purposeful look of the great soldier, alert, fearing nothing, ready with his life as with his sword. In the face of this immortal warrior I see something more. I see the look that we see on the faces of those who have been fighting for us, when they come back for a little while, and a little rest (we have all seen it); the look, half ecstasy, half resignation, which says: "Who dies if England live!"

"Donatello has given us St. George for all time. He is with our soldiers to-day as in the fourteenth, as in the fourth century."

Then I looked down to the Soldier-Boy by my side and I saw in his eyes that he understood.

"There is no need for the dragon," he said.

"No," I replied, "Donatello knew that.

The dragon is already overcome, because his adversary is St. George, and he has conquered Death, too. His soul is immortal, as is the soul of the Belgian people."

Then the Soldier-Boy spoke rapidly and with a queer kind of shyness. "Look," he said, "Donatello's St. George isn't unlike the King of the Belgians. Really they might be brothers, and—and some Belgian soldiers have said that a shining figure like King Albert's has appeared in the trenches and has helped them, as St. George helped the Crusaders. Can it be? How splendid to believe St. George lives on and on, aiding us if we believe."

He stared at the figure of England's patron saint. It was his hour of consecration. Even then the red badge of St. George was being woven by invisible hands beneath his khaki tunic, and I have full faith that he will go into battle one of the great band, linked together through the centuries by the protecting presence of the Soldier-Saint.

“Yes, Donatello understood,” I said, as we turned away. “Prevision is the birth-right of the greatest artists. And to myself I whispered, call it, if you like, a prayer, ‘Soldier-Boy, thou art not alone.’ ”

CHAPTER II

IT IS WELL

“Is it well with the child?” And she answered
“It is well.”—*2 Kings* iv., 26.

THIS war either numbs or enriches. There are sights in hospitals, and in the streets too, that would break the heart if it could break; and after the hurricane of pity, and anger that such things are possible, comes numbness. There are stories about deeds done in the war so fired with selfless splendour, so great, so magnificent, that one is no longer ashamed of living in a world where to kill is a duty, but glad and proud to walk an earth peopled by “our blessed boys.” Then comes enrichment. And since evil must pass, and good must last, it is wiser to dwell on the enrichment of our lives through those who

have died for us, than to be numbed by sorrow. They cannot really die. Innumerable families know that. Those happy warriors! Even the maimed smile. It is well with the boys and with us, in whose hearts they live for evermore.

Tears are near to smiles nowadays. There is one enrichment story that I have often told, and if it sometimes brought tears they were tears of gratitude for such human happenings. Far away it happened, months ago it happened, during the campaign in German South-West Africa, and the men who have given us this immortal memory belonged to the Imperial Light Horse. Some fell in the fight, and their comrades, before they passed on, wrote on the rough memorial, above the lonely grave, these words: "Tell England, ye that pass this monument, that we who rest here died content." So these sons of England are united to the sons of Sparta.

That enrichment came swiftly back to me yesterday, and for long I saw nothing but the

sandy plain, and the few sparse trees, and the silent cross, and those few words, so far away from England. It all came back to me because in the *Sphere*, among the war pictures that one looks at, and shudders in the act of looking, there was one, a few inches square, showing this lonely, distant grave, the cross, and the placard. A few inches square, yet it filled the wide world, enriching it. "We who rest here died content."

What does it mean, this something in man that astonishes and outlives death? That it may prevail he dies gladly, renouncing all he has—life—for a cause, for his country, for his God. All creeds, all shades of belief and unbelief are united in the acknowledgment, common to all, of the inexpressible greatness of sacrifice. Therein all mankind is one in Christ. Can it be that out of the horror of this war will come the conviction, no longer a mere serious pastime, that the things which are not seen are eternal, and that to find them, and to make them real is the true and

only quest of life? The eyes of us who linger wearily at home are still clouded with the fond delusions of unrealities, but those who receive letters from the front, where our brothers face horrible realities, know that they are realising the unseen things in a way that may change the world. One, a surgeon, after remarking quietly, that the house in which he had collected some wounded was shelled and all killed except himself, adds: "So it seems that I am to be spared to serve my country a little longer." No thought you observe, of self—only of his country. Another writes: "On such a day as this, one wishes to read well-expressed words which deal with eternal things"—that was the day after the great advance, and he adds: "War is incredibly dreadful. I say incredible with meaning, for I fail to understand how these blessed boys of ours face with unflinching courage what they do face. . . . It is a matter, I suppose, of faith in the ultimate good."

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I know how one has faced it, and he, in his young, brave way, life just opening, also had faith in the ultimate good. He was near to me, and if I write about him at all it must be very plainly and simply. We knew him as Jack, officially he was No. 2585, Private J. M. Hind, the only son of his parents, and my nephew. A lithe, delicate-looking boy, loving the simple give-and-take of life, just a merry English boy, who sang well and danced well, and worked with a lilt. He joined at the beginning of the war; he saw his duty clear; he ran to it as to a sweetheart, and when he was billeted in a nice house he would not sleep in a bed—"because, you know, I must get used to roughing it." The journey to Flanders was a great adventure. Of discomfort, of hardships, he never wrote: his first letter from the trenches was a pæan of admiration for some veteran who took him into his care and taught him the new warfare. He proved himself a good soldier. There was talk of a commission, and joy, of

coming home. We waited. All was well. We should soon see our Soldier-Boy again. The papers were signed, but he fell in the great advance, in the moment of victory.

Slight frame and lion heart, now merry, now grave—Jack. He had just passed his twentieth birthday when he died for England, and now he rests somewhere in Flanders—content. Is it so very wrong to envy him?

One of his last letters tells of a sermon at church parade. The text was "And underneath are the Everlasting Arms," and the preacher "told us in well-chosen words that, whatever happens, we need never fear death for such a glorious cause, but rather to look upon it as an angel in disguise." The boy added, in his own simple words, "I was fully in agreement with his remarks."

So this war may enrich. His faith strengthens our weakness, his sacrifice sanctifies us. Little Jack, or the British Expeditionary Force, was but one of many—so many who have given all, and who are content. In

our sorrowful hearts joy begins to glimmer.
For we know that it is well with the boys,
and with our boy, and, with us, through our
love for them. Little Jack, No. 2585, of the
British Expeditionary Force:

Adieu!
What need of tears
Or fears,
For you?

CHAPTER III

THE SENTINEL

I WAS trying to write—trying. But it seemed so futile to toy with words, to grope for ideas, when all the world is aflame, and to live we must kill.

How can one write when the mind is filled with incidents of heroism, of self-sacrifice and horror? Shall we ever forget that in August, 1914, the world suddenly became real, ghastly, magnificent—and life inexplicable? Yet even as I was trying to see through the blur of blood, something—consolatory, hopeful—lightened the darkness. What was it? Something in a cherished poem—something about a Sentinel whispering in the deep night. Suddenly the gleam vanished. I threw down my pen. Reverie

was stormed by action. Who can write when he can see, hear, share, even for a moment, in reality, in the splendid side of war? I heard the call of bugles, the tap of drums, and then the little army in the making marched past along the sea-front, and there were cheers, the flashing of handkerchiefs, and a passion of longing to join those youths of England all afire. Many were in civilian clothes. I can never see those boys in their office suits without a catch in the throat.

They sang. They whistled. The air they whistled was the *Marseillaise*, and the song they were singing was not *Fall In!* for that inspiriting recruiting song had already done its fine work for them. They had fallen in, and the song they now sang was *It's a long, long way to Tipperary*. Such discord, such delicious discord! Who can explain why this raw, rough ballad became the marching song of our army? I think I know. One line has made it so—"It's a long, long way to Tipperary"—a line which has a surface

meaning and an inner meaning into which each soldier can read his own thoughts. It's a long, long way to victory, to the cross on the breast, or the cross on the field of honour, ay! and to the heavenly city some may think—well done, thou good and faithful soldier. Yes, Tipperary you are exalted above all other towns—you with your butter market 110 miles south-west of Dublin, you who made some stir in the Plan of Campaign of 1890—you have inspired the marching song of our little army, the made, and in the making. It's a long, long way, little army—but you'll arrive, and our hearts are with you—there.

They passed on whistling the *Marseillaise* and singing this song, and through the dear discord I tried to catch the words. I couldn't go on writing; life has changed. The refrain buzzed in my head. I thought of the last time I had heard it—which was yesterday, hummed by a soldier in a railway carriage. With him I had a little talk.

He was tall, bronzed, and young. He did not read, and I refrained from offering him one of my six newspapers. Clearly his mind was full of great memories, and he hummed that song, and there was thought in his eyes as he sat gazing at the happy English landscape—so peaceful. I scanned his uniform, but could not place him. His badge was unfamiliar. When we reached our destination, this seaside town, I said as he stepped upon the platform, "Will you tell me your regiment?" "Royal Flying Corps," he answered. "Then you will have some fun," I hazarded. He smiled. "I've just come back. Got my machine smashed up. Come home to get another." He went off somewhere, "to get another," and as he went he whistled, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary, it's a long, long way to go . . ."

He was quite happy. Yes, those who go are the happy ones. It is awful to sit at home at ease, but our hearts are uplifted at the thought of those who have gone, who are

going, who have come back to get well, and to go again. West of where I sit is a mighty camp. To the east the hill tops are a maze of little forts and barbed-wire entanglements and inland is a hospital filled with wounded. And this is England! And out there, in grim disarray, the battle rages and our men encounter death as a bride, and agony as a friend. I try to write, but all it means, all it may mean, sweeps ever this luckless stay-at-home, and I strive to recall the passage that was trying to console me when I sat down to write.

Yes, I know it—you know it. It comes to mind, it whispers, and in a moment the cloud lifts. I renounce apprehension and receive with ecstasy the idea of that Sentinel—"Who moves about from place to place, And whispers to the worlds of space, In the deep night, that all is well." Yes, "All is well, tho' faith and form Be sunder'd in the night of fear." He moves about, that Sentinel, from place to place—here, in the camp, at the front, in

the homes of those who have died on the field of honour, over the many, many little graves, by the wounded and the lost. They smile, knowing—all is well.

Right well is it for those who are fighting and training to fight for this dear land. Again I hear the shouts. See, the men are marching back to camp, some in khaki, some in their home clothes, all with heads so high; and hats are raised, and there are cheers, but louder than all in my ears is that delicious discord—the *Marseillaise* and—

It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
It's a long, long way to go;
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
To the sweetest girl I know!
Good-bye, Piccadilly;
Farewell, Leicester-square;
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there!

No, we don't laugh at the words, and the air to which they are set will never be forgotten while we live. "It's a long, long

way to Tipperary"—we all know what that means! Brothers, it's a long, long way, strewn with the brave, our beloved, who have died for us; but we shall be—there. We may not yet see this City of a song, but a light shines above the spires, and the Sentinel is with us all the way.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNDYING THINGS

MY friend was a soldier who would willingly have been a preacher-painter; but he had no talent. His genius was for friendship. Love guided this pilgrim-soldier. Art he loved, and in her by-ways he found some consolation for his mediocrity. In his leisure time he delighted to lose himself in making minute pen drawings of umbrageous trees, and in copying pictures, such as *The Visitation*, by "The Master of the Life of Mary," and *The Merciful Knight who Forgave his Enemy*, by Burne-Jones. Of course he had a vast admiration for Watts. One day he said to me, with his slow, sad smile: "I like Watts because life is greater than art, and Watts, the man, was greater than Watts,

the artist." His favourites were *The Shuddering Angel*, *The Happy Warrior*, and *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*, of which he made a laborious copy.

This copy hung in the studio that his mother had built for him in the garden adjoining her house, and when I chided him for cherishing so sad a theme he said: "That picture is a reminder to me of the Undying Things."

He died for his country. It was a gallant death.

Sometimes I think that he might have written the last letter that the soldier in that fine little book called *Aunt Sarah and the War* wrote to his sweetheart from the front the night before he was killed; that he might have written the postscript to that letter—one line only—"Remember, dear, that Love outlasts death." It does, for us, for you, and for me, anyhow. My visit of condolence to his mother was hardly bearable. His sweetheart was there, too. What can one

say? They were so brave. But I think they wanted to be alone. So did I. They let me go into the studio, by myself, for a little while.

Nothing had been changed, but one white flower had been placed on a table by the side of *Sic Transit*, which hung on the west wall. It is not a picture that appeals to me; this was not even a good copy, and it gave me no consolation. Anger, I am afraid, was uppermost in my mind, resentment at the waste of life, at the suffering of the innocent, at the misery of the world, at the menace of the future. And as I brooded bitterly somebody seated himself by my side. I did not like this intrusion, and yet it seemed natural. I did not turn my head. I accepted his presence without comment.

I looked at the shrouded figure of the dead warrior in Watt's picture—awesome, not beautiful—I thought of my friend beneath the French soil in some unrecorded place, and death seemed hateful, and life a horrid game of chance. My friend was gone

for evermore. The grey picture grew greyer and sadder in the lessening light. "Why did he like it?" I murmured.

The Companion by my side, whose presence I felt, without looking at him, answered: "Look at the lettering painted above the dead warrior—three groups of five words each. The first says, 'What I spent I had.' The second says, 'What I saved I lost.' The third says, 'What I gave I have.' That was why your friend loved this picture, because of these words. They tell of the undying things. And you will remember, if you will but soar out of the gloom in which you have allowed yourself to be submerged, that once your friend quoted to you in a letter something that Watts had written about the undying things. It was this—'All that is most real and best in our lives is that which has no material reality—sentiment, love, honour, patriotism—these continue when the material things pass away.'"

"Yes, I remember, but are not such sug-

gestions merely a kind of drug to fortify us against the hopelessness of life? Is not this insistence upon the undying things merely an amiable conspiracy to make the living believe that all is well, and to keep them enduring to the end. What of his mother and sweetheart? How does his death help them? How does it help me or the world?"

"You must take wider views," said my Companion. "You must look beyond the present, and yet you need not. What you call death is but the gate of life, and if the newspapers are full of sorrow, gloom, and hatred, they are also full of heroism, sacrifice, and transfiguring love. The world has discovered no finer destiny than to die for a cause, an ideal, and if we are not allowed thus to die we can accept joyfully what is perhaps more difficult—the daily torture of living for it without capitulation, whatever may be the odds. The undying things are of God—endless, and the world cannot touch them, and he who clings to them overcomes the

world and uplifts it according to his faith in the undying things. That is what your friend believed. Love outlasts death, and the flame of his love will grow brighter if you will rigorously attune yourself to it. All that was fine in him remains to uplift you and those who loved him."

"Who are you?" I asked. "It is strange, but all you say I have myself sometimes felt and believed."

Then my Companion said: "I am you. Not the you of the dark hour. I am the real you. Love outlasts death, and your friend who died is alive always, to rebuild and make permanent the real you—the undying you, which may help others as he is helping you. What he gave you have."

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And I was alone, as I had been, and yet not alone.

CHAPTER V

WISDOM

TO be a soldier, to be a drop in the great river of effort and sacrifice is not for me. But we must all be patient and brave, we who are condemned to flounder on at home in the sand-clogged delta of that great river—watching and waiting. We peer for the gleam, we strain to hear the eternal voices; we seek wisdom; we look forward to the Ultimate Good.

Unable to be a soldier, I would, if the choice were given me, among all those who plod through the delta using tongue, pen, or pencil, I would choose to be Louis Raemaekers. This Dutch cartoonist, a real and fine artist, this florid, thick-set neutral with the full, roving eyes and the quick, virile move-

ments, has in his great heart, which is universal, not Dutch, a passion for justice and righteousness, and a hatred and scorn for hypocrisy, brutality, and all the vile misuse of strength connoted by the words—Prussian militarism. His cartoons are done with a decoration of artistic beauty that make the sting and cut of their satire doubly terrible.

So I, who have but words for the expression of my feelings, glory in the cartoons of Louis Raemaekers, and gloat over their truth. Had I my will I would gather them all into a book, print a million copies, and scatter them through the neutral and belligerent world. The ancient Hebrews being “uncivilised,” had no name for the Eternal Father. The name of names, the name of the Holy of Holies, was not to be mentioned in speech or writing. Nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet was He, but to be approached only in secret, through the hidden way of the spiritual life. The Prussian, being “civilised,” engraves on his helmet

the words *Gott mit uns*. I rage whenever I see one of those sacrilegious helmets flaunting in a London shop window. But what are words? The clear-seeing Raemaekers has stated all I feel in a cartoon. The Kaiser, a forlorn figure, shouts to the rulers of Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey, who kneel submissively behind him—"At the command '*Gott mit uns*' you will go for them." Think of our fearless, God-reverencing boys, and be thankful for Raemaekers, a neutral.

At the exhibition of his cartoons I listen to the comments of the visitors, for it is inarticulate England that will utter the final word about the war. That elderly English clergyman and his wife, with their out-of-the-world air, what do they think of the war, and of Raemaekers's judgments? They were standing before *The Marshes of Pinsk*, an autumn landscape showing a flood, and borne down upon it are the many bodies of young dead soldiers. Beneath it is this legend: "The Kaiser said last spring, 'When the

leaves fall you'll have peace.' They have it." The woman sobbed. "Poor boys, poor boys," she moaned. "They meant no wrong; they did but do their duty, like our boy."

Her husband led her away. They stopped before a sketch of a young Highlander dying on the field of battle. A German pauses before him and touches his body compassionately. The boy murmurs with his last breath: "Is it you, mother?" I thought the woman would break down. "Hush," whispered her husband. "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God. . . . In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die—but they are in peace." "Where is that from?" she asked, speaking like one comforted. "*Wisdom* iii., 1," he answered, and furtively slipped his handkerchief into her hand.

I went out into the frosty streets, and from the clear sky it seemed as if a voice was repeating what the old man has said: "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die—but they are in peace." I knew the words,

but whence came they? Who said them? What is wisdom? We know it when it comes—that is all. I looked up to the flying clouds, and had the vision of which John Hay wrote, of the Everlasting Angels who hover above us, knowing everything, judging everything, telling the truth about everything. It seemed that if I could once get away from the streets and the crowds and the babble, there must be some place, within or without, where I could commune with those Everlasting Angels, perhaps our own particular Guardian Angels, and learn from them wisdom and remember it always. Who gave us the wisdom to know that our beloved who are gone are in peace? Who——.

All of us, even in ecstatic moments, are still of the earth, loving the spectacle of bright heroic things; and I, suddenly, at the sight of a corps of Flying Men swinging down the street, forget everything but them. These gay and jaunty bird-like men with their dandy caps, their tight uniforms, and

their air of responsible irresponsibility, are the new note of the war. They are like no other soldiers; they are not of the earth; the stars are their counsellors; they have taken on the freedom of the air, the unfettered mystery of space, and, in doing so, they have become quick and alert and remote like birds. The stupid streets are not for them; their home is towards the stars; they soar; they consort with the Everlasting Angels, who watch and talk gravely, with infinite wisdom, of our poor doings. O, to be a Bird Man to rise higher and higher, away from chatter and error to where the great heart of wisdom waits! Then, in a flash, knowledge came to me. The thought of the Bird Men and their untrammelled flight into space cleared my muddy brain. *Wisdom* iii., 1. Why, of course, the old man was quoting from the Wisdom of Solomon.

I went home, found *Wisdom* iii., 1, and read—"But the souls of the righteous are in

the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction; but they are in peace."

Then I turned to the first chapter of *Wisdom* and read—"For froward hearts separate from God." . . . "For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world." . . . "For God made not death; neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living." . . . "For wisdom is a loving spirit."

I lowered the lights and opened the window to a great night of stars, peace, and the presence of our angels, our dear ones, everlasting and intimate, whom we knew on earth, and whom we will know again. All was well, for it was plain that, whatever man may do, wisdom had spoken. And He will carry on, not in the helmet, in the heart.

CHAPTER VI

TO A SUBALTERN

YOU read an article of mine called "Wisdom"; you sent me a brief letter about it, which touched me more than I can say. It was modest and frank; soldier-like, it faced squarely your gleam of the vision beautiful.

You gave no address, no name; you signed yourself simply "Yours gratefully, Subaltern," and the only knowledge I have about you is your statement that you are a soldier "who has seen some service in Flanders." That is enough. Dear friend, never tell me anything more. I intend to cherish the idea that you, unknown to me, are of the kin of St. George and St. Denis, and that wherever you are, whatever your lot, you belong to those over whom death cannot prevail. You

fight the good fight against evil, you are on the side of the spiritual man who wants nothing, against the material man who demands everything. You fight for Christ against the devil, for St. George against the dragon, for love against hate. Remember always those grave, gracious words of truth that Romain Rolland has uttered: "For the finer spirits of Europe there are two dwelling-places; our earthly fatherland, and that other City of God. To the one let us give our lives and our faithful hearts; but neither family, friend, nor fatherland, nor aught that we love, has power over spirit. The spirit is the Light."

You will fight cleanly and dauntlessly, you will take no thought of self. Let me tell you that to be a soldier, nowadays, is to be one of the great army of the consecrated, so human, so dear, of whom sometimes we have a hurried glimpse, laden with their battered accoutrements, spattered with the mud of Flanders, laughing and singing songs; and some are grave, our soldier-stalwarts, so

human, so dear, who have enlisted in the cause of righteousness, to whom the White Comrade is a reality and victory a sure event. You, my subaltern, will fight valiantly, but in your heart there is a little trouble, a natural longing. In your communication you say:—"If my letter conveys to you the earnest desire that men have, for the spiritual reasons for their part in this war to be sustained and impressed upon them, I shall not have written in vain."

It is hard, I know, soldier, to be conscious always that behind the brutality and stupidity of war the lights of the City of the Soul shine unquenchable; because they shine you must fight, and keep their glow in your heart while your body contends for England, her homes and village greens, and for the children who will be England when we have passed on. He who fights for freedom fights for England, and he who dies for England dwells in God with those who made our land and in our protection left it.

The war rages. "Nothing the same," cry our publicists, "now and henceforth." That is true of the material world. But in the spiritual world the whisper is "Everything the same" to-day and for ever. Nothing, neither principalities, nor powers, neither suffering nor sorrow, neither victory nor defeat can quench, if your heart wills, one flicker of your spiritual life. It is always silently accompanying the real You, always your very own. The flame cannot be seen, so we make symbols of it for our comfort; they are but symbols, and it is you alone who can fan the flame.

It is hard, soldier, in the awfulness of this war, to keep the flame of the spiritual life steadily burning without fuss and without talk; but this, the greatest of all life's adventures, has got to be carried through to victory. The prize, the crown, like the Victoria Cross, is valueless, yet beyond price. Win that and we shall win the other crown against our material enemy. Love turns his head

away from the lust for power and domination to be won at any cost, but love will prevail through simple art of loving to the end, and because love is eternal, spiritual, and the other is temporal, material. This is the Christmas season when we venerate the obeisance of the pomp and power of the world to Undying Love, and the custom will never cease, because it holds an immortal truth. You may have seen those small, grave pictures of *The Adoration of the Magi*, by the nameless masters of the Rhine valley, who live only as the "Master of the Life of Mary," the "Master of the Holy Kinship," and other holy and humble titles cloaking these unforgotten Teutons, to whom the spiritual was more real than the material. Therefore the mystics of the Rhine valley will live and move when Prussianism has followed into the darkness other ugly dreams.

Well, in the collection of cartoons by Raemaekers there is just such a picture. It is in quiet, tender colours, and at first sight

it might be a rendering of *The Adoration of the Magi*, wrought by a primitive painter, some mystic of the Rhine or the Meuse valleys, in lonely ecstasy. But look closer. You perceive that the grim King who kneels is the Kaiser; his offer is a menacing, shining shell. The second King is the Austrian Emperor; his offering is a model of a Maxim gun. The third is the Sultan of Turkey; his offering is a blood-stained, curling knife. And the Child to whom these twentieth century offerings are made, on the eve of the holy Christmas season, by the rulers of the material world—the Child, Undying Love, turns away in tears and hides His face in His Mother's bosom.

It is your lot, soldier, your high privilege, to dry those tears, to turn the face of Undying Love again to the tormented race of man with the smile of understanding, compassion, and healing. The task is hard, soldier, and yet very easy if we but remember that although material power seems to domi-

nate the world—that is not so. We must fight this material menace of greed and wilful destruction, using our utmost efforts to vanquish and crush it; but it is from the hidden seed of the spiritual world, here around us, in our hearts, that victory will blossom. Fight the good fight with clear brain and strong right arm, but remember also that the final triumph (the coming of the Kingdom of God, as well as the defeat of the enemy of God) draws nearer each time you deny the passing supremacy of evil and affirm the eternity of good. Every heroic, self-denying act in this war is an expression of good—God: every victory in your own heart and nature, each choice you make of the spiritual over the material, each sacrifice of the individual for the great cause will help to dry that Child's tears, lessen the misery of this man-made war, and bring us nearer to our rightful and real home, that spiritual kingdom where Good reigns, where there is no sense of evil, for Love has won.

We dare much in the material world—you soldiers dare everything. We must also dare much in our search for the spiritual world, and be unafraid. It is hard, I know, soldier, to keep the flame alive, but I pray you burn it bravely, unseen but eager, knowing that no material blast can ever quench it. “Why did the lamp go out?” asked the sage. “I shaded it with my cloak, to save it from the wind,” answered the student.

Remember, soldier, that there is no wind, however wild, can darken your lamp if you are as fearless in the spiritual world as you are in the material. My heart, unseen, follows you through your ordeal. Dry the tears of that Child, my soldier, before another Christmas dawns. Our prayers enfold you, our confidence encompasses you.

CHAPTER VII

THE SENSITIVE

IT is not well to be a Sensitive in these days. Neither his apprehension nor his poetry is needed. He is unhappy, being a Sensitive—worse, he is apt to be useless. The world needs optimism, the conviction that right will prevail, and a faith that no assaults can weaken. It is exhilarating to talk with a Soldier; it is sad to listen to a Sensitive. Yet the Sensitive with whom I chatted yesterday finally exhilarated me, after he had stumbled to a resolution (which I hope he will keep).

The afternoon was grey and gusty. I was standing in a windy place watching a company, who are too old to join the new Army, drilling for home defence. It was splendid.

They were carrying on. Some were over sixty, many were bald-headed and large of girth, and as they drilled they panted and perspired. It was difficult for some of them to stoop, but they went through all the evolutions gallantly. Their spirit conquered their distress. One was a writer (he had also been a grandfather for years), who, in the happy times of peace, would be seated, at this hour, before his library table surrounded by a zareba of reference books. Now he finds himself clad in a white sweater, doubling round a quadrangle, listening not to the hesitant voice of the Muse, but to the sharp word of command. I saluted him. He smiled. I felt ennobled. His country had called, and he was "doing his bit" for England. I thought of Henley's poem—Henley who should have lived to see this day—that sight, those elderly men forcing their time-worn bodies to be soldierlike, for England. But Henley was there in spirit. The dead do not forsake us, and to my heart

from somewhere came his poem—"What have I done for you, England, my England?"

A little later I spoke the lines aloud, for the Sensitive (he is under forty) suddenly appeared at my side. I waved towards squad D and said:

What have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?

They call you proud and hard,
England, my England:
You with words to watch and ward,
England, my own!

Ever the faith endures,
England, my England:—
Take and break us; we are yours,
England, my own!

I couldn't go on with the poem.

The Sensitive's eyes filled with tears. That is one of the many disadvantages of being a Sensitive. The tears come so readily.

The Sensitive spoke. "I've been doing indoor work—helping to organise—but I'm not a good organiser, and I never quite grasped what we were organising. I'm afraid I was rather in the way. I'm superfluous. I can't settle to anything. This awful war weighs on me like a disease. I envy the soldiers. I envy the dead. I envy all who have escaped this cataclysm. I want to help, but my little gift, my verses, which are my moments of insight, don't come now. Yet the poets have their place—haven't they? Henley was lame. He couldn't have fought; he couldn't have drilled. Yet that poem of his, that message from the past, is an inspiration to-day. He lives still; he still encourages us. Shall I go down to the camps and recite *England, my England* to the troops? Or shall I join this company here and drill? I feel sometimes that I could do anything so long as it is not clerical work or organising. I want hardening; I want to escape from myself."

We went home by the Tube, and for two stations he moaned over the state of this unpardonable world. "England, my England," he murmured, "to think of it, the only way to preserve you is to kill Germans. Logically, that's the only thing to do, and this in the year of our Lord 1916. But for those who are not called to kill Germans or to succour Belgians I suppose the next best thing is to go on doing our nearest duty just as well as we can."

I nodded.

"A man helped me last night," continued the Sensitive. "I called upon him at a late hour, and found him engrossed at his desk. 'What are you doing?' I asked. He dissembled. I insisted. At last he said—'When the war broke out I concentrated in my leisure time, on the most difficult and most arduous piece of work that I could invent. I forced my mind to control the whims of my body.' That man's example helped me," said the Sensitive. "He had

chosen the hardest duty, and was doing it with set teeth."

Suddenly the Sensitive clutched my arm. The train was at a station. "Look," he cried, indicating a placard on which was displayed this announcement—"Join the Volunteer Reserve for his Majesty's Fleet. Apply the Commanding Officer, R.N.V.R., Headquarters, Commercial-road."

He was silent for awhile. The soul of him was working.

"I hate the sea," said the Sensitive. The words exploded from him. "I loathe machinery, the mere idea of submarines appals me, but I'll do it. I'll join the Volunteer Reserve. I will. God help me."

I looked into his eyes. Verily I believe that he had taken his resolution, that he had chosen his "hardest duty, and would set his teeth to it."

Later his imagination began to play around the extremes of his destiny. I do not think he quailed, but he saw the worst, not the

best. You cannot cease being a Sensitive instantly.

"In the wintry sea," he said, "with perhaps half my body blown away, I would like to shout with my mouth if that be still intact, 'Take and break us: we are yours, England, my own.' That would be the heroic part of me, so long obscured; but my heart, the faithful heart of my mother, in me, would long to cry out to the broken bits of men struggling in the water—'Little children, in spite of all this horror, in spite of the heaped-up agony of the world, it is true, essential truth, that "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." The victory is yours, little children.' I should like that to be the last utterance of an obscure sailorman to the world in these days, when England's sons find it necessary to offer their lives, not for conquest, but for an Ideal."

The Sensitive ceased. I am sure he meant what he said. And because he meant it,

because it was his moment of insight, whatever his fate may be, quick death or splendid life, that statement of unassailable faith, in a moment of insight, of escape from self, may be his "bit," his message—so old, so young, so faded, so fresh—to the unconquerable soul of our determined race, plodding grimly but gaily to Victory.

Ever the faith endures,
England, my England.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUIET ROOM

AGAIN a poem has been eluding, yet comforting me. How does it run, and who wrote it? Memory will not recall that poem of consolation born of the spirit. You may be sure that it was very simple, and sincere, for in these times all else irritates. It was as simple and sincere as Lord Roberts's message to the world (almost his last) given through a friend. "We must do what we consider to be our duty—then we are in God's hands." The poem and the poet will recur to me soon, I am sure. Meanwhile——.

Banishing the idea of the poem, I returned to what I had been doing, which was something quite unheroic. I had been turning the pages of the illustrated weekly journals.

In a little while I closed them, put the journals away, hid them. I could not endure to look at the portraits of those who have died on the field of honour for our homes, for us, for England. They look so young, so hopeful, so gallant. O yes, we envy them! We cannot help it. We may be giving our best, our poor best, but they have given everything. And nothing shall ever wrest from me—neither reason, nor argument, nor sorrow—the assurance that “They who die for England sleep with God.”

Happily, most of those who go out to fight carry through the ordeal with a light heart. I have never met an unhappy or an apprehensive soldier, and their letters from the front inspire in us gratitude, wonder, and relief. I read and re-read the following, written by a cavalry subaltern who had been in the trenches five days and nights, with shrapnel coming about two shells a minute: “It is all the best fun. I’ve never felt so well or so happy or enjoyed anything so

much, and so does everybody. The fighting excitement vitalises everything, every sight, and word, and action."

Is it not wonderful? Truly it is some consolation to us, waiting wearily at home, aching for them, to know that our brothers can encounter horror with such intrepidity. The soldier is not introspective. He is under orders; he has something definite to do, and he does it dashing. Yes, we may envy him, and if he dies quickly it is we who suffer. "Ours the pain. But his, oh, his the undiminished gladness, the undecaying glory, the undeparted dream." It was R. L. Stevenson who wrote that before the war. It seems so long ago. That is the dividing line in our lives now—before and since the war. It pounds on. The world shakes. Our lives are changed and reformed. Many are glad to be alive in such an amazing period. The bereaved meet their losses with fortitude, and with an inner joy that will rise, as time passes, like a spring, for they know

that they have given their beloved for their country. What reward could be too great for those who have died on the field of honour? In our poor human tongue I can think of no fuller expression of all we hope for them, than that line, "They who die for England sleep with God." Each of the living, in his own soul, can give his own meaning to those words.

Yesterday I visited a London hospital to see a wounded officer. I found my friend, mending slowly, but he could not move. It was quiet, in the ward only the hushed voices of the visitors, but there was one youth moaning near by. A shadow passed over my friend's face. I said to him: "Do the cries of that poor fellow upset you?" "Oh, no," he answered, "I was thinking of—you." After he had told me how he had been wounded I asked if he slept well. He replied: "Not at first. I had awful nightmares, heard the bursting shrapnel, thought I was back in the trenches, and awoke to see those

flowers on the table." He smiled—a smile of quiet happiness. His uniform hung at the bed-head, on the other side were the flowers, strewn over the quilt was a litter of papers. This soldier, now briefly at rest, was, for the first time, following the course of the war. He talked of getting well, of joining his comrades at the front again. He was a religious man, Life to him was duty. I thought of Lord Roberts's words—the creed of the Happy Warrior—"We must do what we consider to be our duty—then we are in God's hands."

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That night I sat in my room reflecting on those wounded officers at the hospital, and rejoicing in their respite of peace, each in his quiet room. And, as I reflected, the poem that had been eluding yet comforting me suddenly came to mind, and I knew that it was by the Quaker poet Whittier, whose simple verses have comforted innumerable

harassed souls. This poem was called *The Meeting*;

And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room;
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on every side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off, and leaves us God alone.

Most moderns have foregone the beneficial habit of meditation, but in these times how salutary it is for us to retire into the Quiet Room for a little while. All becomes plain and sane again.

The world that time and sense have known,
Falls off, and leaves us God alone.

God grant that it may be so to many! I sit here in the Quiet Room. I can bear now to think of those who have fallen, and in this moment of initiation I feel encouraged to

change one word in that line from a poem which I have already written down. I would change it into—"Those who die for England wake with God."

CHAPTER IX

JUNE JOY

HE was home—wounded. His bed was in the last of the cubicles at the end of the long corridor-ward of the Hospital. In each bed was a man, and there were groans and cries. Sometimes I feared that I could never reach the end of that corridor without fainting; but the thought of my friend, a mere boy, who flinched neither from the pain of his wound, nor from the daily probing, sustained me. One day his eyes motioned to something I had written for a morning paper. It was lying on the coverlet. "Read it," he whispered. I did so. "Too sad," he said. "I don't want to hear about the war. I want the old days. I want to hear about flowers, and poetry, and how the country looks in

June." So, next day, when I called, I read him this, written in the happy Before.

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Calling upon my friend Roger at that hour of mystery, a June twilight, I found him in rueful mood. Something had distressed this invalid author. Yet, he should be happy. His latest book, I may whisper to you, won the prize (a bound volume of *Notes and Queries*) for the prettiest dedication of the year. It ran: "To Hetty—she knows why."

The lamps were unlighted in his sitting-room where I found Hetty trying with neat fingers, to unravel the string of a dumpy brown paper parcel. This couple belong to the class of string preservers. Roger, stretched on a couch, worried and weary, was watching Hetty.

"What is it?" I asked, for Roger carries his joy or his grief on his face, conspicuous as a gala flag.

"I've just paid two pounds and sixpence

to a taxi-cab driver for sheer pleasure. The extravagance of it lacerates me."

"Perhaps it was worth while," I remarked.

"Yes! A thousand times over and over again," cried Hetty. "Oh, Roger, what is two pounds and sixpence for this day of joy! Think of the light, and the flowers, the warm winds, the glorious trees; think of the Thames from Richmond Hill; think of the peace of Ham Common; think of the gratification of the driver when you paid him two pounds and sixpence. He gets a quarter of it for himself, and he has seven children. Think of——"

Here Uncle Ben, who was expected to supper, entered the room, having, I am sure, overheard Hetty's rush of words. He sank heavily into a chair, and said ominously: "I've come from Richmond by 'bus—three 'buses. Proceed, Hetty."

She rearranged the rug over Roger's knees, and began: "It all came about by chance. Roger and I are not taxi people, but this morning, on the way home from marketing,

I saw a driver in a beautifully clean holland overall polishing the brasswork of his cab, doing it lovingly. I nearly stopped. (Hetty is not very young.) I did stop, and boldly asked him what preparation he was using. He told me; he also told me that it was, in a way, his own cab, as he is a member of a little company of twenty-two men owning seven cabs. They receive 25 per cent. of the takings, and pay for the petrol. His accent was educated, and (Hetty blushed) he suggested that it was a perfect day for a run to Richmond Park. Don't look cross, Uncle. Business was in his mind, not gallantry. Would you believe it, Roger had never been to Richmond Park, and he can't walk much; and his last birthday—oh! I forgot it."

"Well?" said Uncle Ben.

"I gave the man our address, and told him to call at 3 P.M. I never thought about the cost. It did not seem possible that anybody could ever pay more than five shillings

for a cab fare, or go farther than from Hampstead to Charing Cross in holiday time. He came. The cab was brand new. We started. O the rapture of gliding through the greenery of the Park from Bayswater to Kensington this perfect June day!

“To sit for the first time in a new motor, to skim through the world in perfect comfort, everything forgotten in the mere joy of seeing—Uncle, it’s heaven! We reached Hammersmith in a dream—that awful eddy of traffic by the Broadway, usually an agony, was now a gay spectacle. We were at peace, everybody else in turmoil. I felt so selfish, yet so happy. Then the vistas of shining water from Hammersmith Bridge! You loved that, Roger! I knew you did, because you at once wanted to declaim poetry. You pulled from your pocket your book of the moment—Faber’s hymns, in the tattered brown-paper cover—and all across Barnes Common you crooned your favourites. It all seemed so true, didn’t it, dear? We swept on, in

radiance, in harmony, in hope—one with Faber when he sang:

For the Love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

Soon we found the world again—in the bright traffic of the Richmond Road. Then the turn into Priory Lane, and, through the trees, glimpses of the polo players. O strength! O rushing movements! O dancing colours! O youth tingling with the joy of action! O happy, happy youth!” (Hetty is no mean poet, and a great favourite in one of the most advanced circles of *T. P's. Weekly*.)

“And so to our goal—Richmond Park. Ecstasy was that sweep round to Robin Hood Gate! Masses of rhododendrons, glimpses of distant water, oak-trees and tawny deer, young bracken, and the infinity of rolling green,—up, up, higher, higher, till we reached the topmost plateau, and there,

outstretched, swooning in light, was the rich Thames Valley, and beyond, losing themselves in the heat-drenched haze, the soft encircling hills."

Uncle Ben placed a lozenge in his mouth, and masticated it vociferously. "Gas!" I could almost hear him say.

"We surrendered ourselves to the chauffeur," mumbled Roger. "I felt like a child taken by his governess for a holiday jaunt. He patronised us; he indicated the course of the Thames, feeling for its level through the valley. Then he said peremptorily: 'You must see Ham Common.' "

"Is there anything more beautiful?" asked Hetty.

"I shall always associate Ham Common with Strindberg," said Roger.

Uncle Ben, who was becoming a little fidgety signalled a "Why?"

Hetty smiled, and said: "We swept down through a lovely glade, out of the little lonely gate, and, would you believe it? we drove

five times round the Common. We could not leave it. Peace had descended upon the world—peace and harmony, and even a glimpse of No. 101 motor-bus pounding back to the Strand did not disturb our tranquillity. At the beginning of the sixth round we stopped. I wanted to be alone for a few minutes in the quiet church. When I returned I found that Roger had just finished reading a four-column notice of the life and works of Strindberg in the *Nation*. There never was such a man as Roger for carrying books and papers with him."

"Yes," said Roger, "and henceforward I'm saved from reading anything by Strindberg. The duty menaced me. I dreaded it, shrank from the sloughs of disharmony, and, lo! a quotation of four words in that review saves me from muddling myself over Strindberg. Why should I bother about the excursions into materiality of his tormented intellect, his search for the path, for, on his deathbed he reached the point of enlighten-

ment which might have been his when he toddled from his child's crib."

"And that was?" said Uncle Ben.

"On his deathbed, Strindberg held up the Bible, and said: 'This alone is right.' "

"As an impresario," continued Hetty, "our driver was a genius. He insisted on our visiting Richmond Hill for the view, and without more ado whirled us thither. Then he transported us back through the Park—silent trees, golden light, and the hush of eve—out into the Kingston Road, and up, over a surface smooth as a sheet of glass, to Wimbledon Common. But this fatherly driver had not finished with us yet. He whirled us to the Windmill; he dodged here and there over the Common, skirted a road bordered with comfortable houses, half-hidden in trees, to Putney Hill, and, would you believe it, not until we were delayed by the traffic on Putney Bridge did either of us look at the dial. We looked. It was awful!"

"We awoke from our dream," said Roger.

"No, no!" cried Hetty. "There was still the Embankment, with the life of the river, the swirl of the water, and the glory of the light transfiguring the buildings into fairy palaces; there was still the majesty of Westminster, the peacocks and strange fowl strutting on the sward by the water in the Green Park; there was still the Mall, straight, spacious, sunny, and the old Palace of St. James's (all the wonder of London on a June evening), and the blaze of flowers behind the railings of Park Lane; then home to hold for ever the amassed memories of this perfect day in June."

"One pound eighteen on the dial, and half a crown tip, making two pounds and sixpence," said Roger, gloomily.

There was silence in the quiet room. Hetty took the dumpy brown-paper parcel from the chair where she had placed it, and again began to unravel the string. This time she succeeded. It contained three books, crown 8vo, buckram, gilt—beautiful

books—and on the cover of each was a golden wreath of thorns and laurel, with the words: *The Works of Francis Thompson; Verse and Prose.*

I glanced at Uncle Ben. In his thirst for culture he had, I had reason to know, because it was at my instigation, once agonized over *The Hound of Heaven*.

Uncle Ben took the first volume in his massive hand, and, as his fingers fluttered through the pages, he said, slowly: "I prefer Faber because I can understand him. He is sane and wholesome. So far as I am concerned Francis Thompson's poetry might be written in a foreign tongue. The meaning escapes me, sir, and I am not supposed to be a fool. I like poetry that you can learn by heart, and repeat to yourself when inclined."

I began to be nervous, for Roger is an ardent Thompsonian, but my apprehension was allayed by a sudden light that flickered into Uncle Ben's eyes, a gleam of the fine old sporting instinct that is one of his pleasant-

est attributes. Addressing Hetty, he said: "I'll make you a bet," and, with a chuckle, "you needn't pay me if you lose. I'll close my eyes and put my finger on a chance page in this first volume, and Hetty, if you'll learn that page by heart in ten minutes I'll refund the two pounds and sixpence you spent on your Joy Ride."

Dump went his finger upon a page, his watch flashed from its fob, the book was handed to Hetty, and, for ten minutes, the tenseness of the silence was almost unbearable.

"Time's up," cried Uncle Ben, taking the book. Whereupon the admirable Hetty repeated, without a fault, the poem called *Love and the Child*, on which Uncle Ben's finger had rested. In her clear voice she recited:

Why do you so clasp me,
And draw me to your knee?
Forsooth, you do but chafe me,
I pray you let me be:

I will but be loved now and then
When it liketh me!

So I heard a young child,
A thwart child, a young child,
Rebellious against love's arms,
Make its peevish cry.

To the tender God I turn:—
“Pardon, Love most High!
For I think those arms were even Thine,
And that child was even I.”

Uncle Ben paid up immediately—the odd sixpence in coppers. He is indeed a true “sport.” As we sat down to supper Hetty murmured: “This has been perfect joy—this day of June.” Roger assented. Uncle Ben grunted. I smiled.

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The wounded soldier boy smiled, too. “Is Hetty very nice?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“You might bring her to see me,” he said.
Then he smiled again.

CHAPTER X

THE VISION SPLENDID

I SAT in Hyde Park waiting for the soldiers. There was to be a march past, I had been told, with the bag-pipes, tooting *Blue Bonnets over the Border*, the drums banging, and the fifes asking shrilly, "What does he know of England who only England knows?" We were to see the soldier boys swinging away to camp, for the eve of their departure for the front had come. So I sat in Hyde Park waiting for the—soldiers.

The three ragged little girls mothering two babies were also waiting. Silent and solemn, they were seated on the grass in front of the Serpentine bathing-place. The policeman on duty by the diving-boards was also waiting. He watched, and he was eyed

by a horde of ragamuffin boys. They, too, were waiting. It was a quarter before six, and not until the hour struck would the policeman move from the water's edge and allow the boys to rush to their evening dip. Each was prepared for the supreme moment; each had cast all his rags away except breeches and braces, and each—there were half a hundred of them—was shouting and playing—waiting noisily.

Ugh! The sight of the boys was cheerful enough. But why were they not Scouts? I thought of a Boy Scout who had called at my house to solicit a small sum for a concert. "And how are you going on?" I asked. "Fine," he answered, and drawing himself up proudly: "Five of us have been killed already." O Life, O Death, O Time! "Wisdom contemplating mankind," said a great writer, "is filled with pity and disdain." But God understands.

Those ragamuffin boys, who should have been Scouts, were beginning life; their state

of rags and poverty was powerless to affect their joy in the moment; they lived in the present, the future threw no shadow; it had not begun. But when I turned in my chair and faced towards the park I saw on a bank, sitting and dozing in the sunshine, a score or so of vagrants, old, middle-aged, and young men, some making a meal off broken bits of food which they had brought with them wrapped in newspapers, others mending their tattered clothes, each engrossed with his poor self—apathetic, indifferent to the world except as a place from which sustenance might be snatched furtively. These were the men who should be fighting—these useless lives. Surely a time will come in the history of the world, when man, if he must fight, will thrust the unfit into the firing line, not the fit and the valiant.

Soothed by the warmth of the sun, they were waiting until it was time to prowl forth under cover of night to the dim streets, offering chances. Boys beginning, men ending

life, mortal realities, hope and hopelessness, and I trying to make up my mind about this madness of war that had seized the world.

As I sat in the sunshine waiting, I saw between me and the shining water a picture, not on canvas, but in the mind's eye, a picture of the funeral of an old woman of the very poor class, a caretaker in a church, who might have been the mother of one of those boys, or the wife of one of those men. And I saw in the mind's eye, as the modest procession passed through the mean streets, hats being raised and eyes following the poor cortège affectionately; and when a passer-by asked someone who had known the old woman what was the secret of her influence, he answered, and to make his meaning quite sure he wrote it down:

"Her secret was an open one. She had never lost the vision splendid nor let Heaven slip from her heart."

The vision splendid! Was not that what I was really waiting for, the vision splendid,

ever present in life, and one day to be made plain to all? Between the lively boys and the lethargic men the old woman intervened, and from her coffin manifested it.

The clock struck six. The boys doffed their breeches and rushed wildly into the water. As the policeman moved away he caught sight of the three little girls mothering the two babies who had waited so patiently.

"Now you be off," he cried. Obediently they rose, knowing that it is life to be moved on just when the fun begins. They went away ruefully, staggering under the weight of the babies. As they climbed the railings one raised her head and saw the splendour of the sky with the sun half hidden by a racing cloud, and she said: "Oh, look, Polly!"

Polly looked. For an instant the clamour of the world was hushed; I think in that moment they forgot all about the policeman and the splashing urchins. And I, waiting for the soldiers who never came, had found the vision splendid—in a funeral and a sky.

CHAPTER XI

ART AND IMMORTALITY

BEFORE the war he was a musician devoted to fugues and etchings. Now he is a Flight Sub-Lieutenant (R.N.), absorbed in aeroplanes and anti-aircraft guns. He is quite happy, although he lives in a hut on a muddy plain and, weather permitting, risks his life daily in the air.

I sat in his comfortable study in London awaiting him, thinking of the vicissitudes of life which had converted the musician from a Fuguist into a Flying Man. Soon I laughed, recalling this passage from Jeremy Taylor—"All parts of the scheme are eternally chasing each other, like the parts of a fugue." *His* game is still to chase something, but the quarry has changed—that's all.

There was a pleasant rush of air as the door opened. In he came. "You," he said, and smiled, "Oh, it's good to be home again, even for a night." We talked, not of war; we talked about the Rembrandt etchings that hung upon the walls, of the *Abraham and Isaac*, the eternal lesson of sacrifice, which has always, we know not why, been the last glad refuge and triumph of humanity. "Rembrandt was initiate," said I. "He muddled his material life, but his spiritual vision was never obscured. It was as clear to him as the world's dumb fealty to sacrifice." "Yes," said the Musician, "Rembrandt knew, and because he had no doubts about his spiritual knowledge he helps us now enormously. That picture there is, to me, the spiritual expression of our cause. It abides with me in all danger."

His eyes were raised above the mantelpiece. They were looking at a large photograph of Rembrandt's, *Polish Rider*—that unforgettable picture, a warrior riding forth through

a romantic landscape, but the mission of this rider is born of the spirit, not of the flesh: he rides forth to fight for right, not for might. "That picture sustains me," said the Musician. "I return here for another look at it. Its message cannot fade. This war has taught me that a picture can have the essence of immortality and can help us to see light beyond the blackness of a moment."

"Yes," I said, "and music has that power too. Mendelssohn has it."

The Maker of Fugues flared up. I had touched a sensitive nerve. "Really," he said, "you must not admire Mendelssohn. He is neither profound, nor pathetic, nor spiritual—he's merely melodious and cheerful. In art you do not permit yourself to like Correggio. Moreover, Mendelssohn was a German."

"Being dead he lives forgiven. Listen! Here's my case about Mendelssohn, not theory but fact. It happened; and a day closed joyously because of this dead German

who loved England, who was happy and who made melody out of his happiness. His joy is with us still; it cannot be taken from a broken-hearted world. Art is love, God is love, and, who knows, it may be through art to God that our hearts will be made whole again. But you want my story, a little story, telling how a little song brought healing.

“O, but it was a doleful day with a gusty wind, a blurred sky, and a drizzle of rain. I tried to be cheerful because I was beginning a brief holiday, but an ambulance train entered the station five minutes before we started. I, trying not to look, saw it all—those bronzed boys helpless—in pain. The tenderness of the nurses and orderlies I saw too, and also the stained bandages and the broken lives. I tried to visualise Rethel’s engraving of *Death as a Friend*, tried to repeat once more Henley’s lines, ‘Take us, break us, we are yours, England, my own,’ but the words swam out of sight in a mist.

I arrived at my destination to discover that my luggage had gone astray.

“That destination was a coast town, lovely in sunshine, unlovely in the darkening gloom, with barricades and barbed wire on the front, and deep trenches in the yellow sands. Night fell, no lamps were lighted, and the nocturne recruiting meeting that was held outside the hotel was like calling to ghosts to quit themselves like men. During dinner we were startled by the screech of syrens from the sea; then a gun boomed. We peeped through the curtains; only blackness and foreboding. Afterwards in the lounge the little company were silent. The evening papers came. A woman looked eagerly down the casualty lists and began to cry.

“ ‘So,’ I murmured, ‘this is England in war-time! Thank God night will soon come to hide in oblivion this atrocious day.’ As I spoke a servant opened the pianoforte, and another led in two blind men. One had a violin.

"They played Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*. And at once, swift as light, gloom went, joy came, hope and gladness rippled into our hearts, because two blind makers of music were playing Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, thus once more affirming the eternal mission of art."

"But Mendelssohn isn't art," said the Musician. "Now Mozart——"

"Well, call him immortal," said I, "like Rembrandt; for to cheer, from the grave, one lonely, living soul is Immortality, which is greater than art. Thus we may begin to understand the Communion of Saints by Rembrandt and Mendelssohn."

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The Musician, who is now a Flight Sub-Lieutenant (R.N.), smiled, and as he smiled he whistled the *Spring Song*, and as he whistled he looked reverently at the *Polish Rider*. "Yes," he said, "as one star differs from another in glory, so, I suppose, there are degrees of Immortality."

CHAPTER XII

THE UNFORGETTABLE SIGHT

I HAD been in the neighbourhood of the camp where her grandson, aged nineteen, was stationed. He sailed for France the next day. Later, on my return to London, I hastened to her house.

She is old in years—very old—but her heart is young. It is always spring-time in her heart. There she sits in her arm-chair by the fire, dwelling on the wants and ways of others, carrying on, carrying out the precepts of a living philosopher who has said that “whatever comes after death, the command of life is the same—to expand out of oneself into the larger life of the world.” That, I know, is her Easter text, her first prayer on the Bright Day.

She is of soldier stock, a mother and grandmother of warriors, and the last of them is her grandson, aged nineteen. Quickly she showed me a letter from him, written in pencil when he was crossing the Channel, reading aloud this passage: "I shall be at the front by Easter, granny—our Easter." She sighed, but refused to be sad.

To her quiet room have come, all this year, many soldiers, some on brief leave from the front, others recovering from wounds. They do not talk much. Some kiss her hand, and say a few words. Her fine old face is firm, there is no moisture in her eyes, for she is of the soldier breed. Once only have I seen the tears start to her estimating eyes, and that was—I will tell you about it later.

These men, these soldiers from the front, war-worn, grave, the look of command in their eyes, and that other look, uplifting all who have seen unutterable things, who know the cost of victory, and who return to face

death—these men give to her drawing-room the atmosphere of the heroic age. Individuals come and go, but the type is always present, and, seeing them, I plead for forgiveness for the wickedness of war in gratitude for the spiritual evolution that, out of complexities of horror, can produce this selfless type of heroism.

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On this day she was alone, her knitting in her hands, her grandson's letter marking a page in a thick green book resting upon her lap. "Browning's *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*," she said, "I always read it this week each year. Once I read it to him—poor boy, he was so bored. It was at Winchelsea, and the meadows were full of little frisking lambs, and the larks were singing. We have spent so many Easters together, and always away from London. Once, early on Easter Sunday, he brought me a daffodil, and he said, as he gave it to me: 'He is risen,' and I

answered, in the old way. 'He is risen, indeed,' and he whispered: 'Granny is that why you and I are always so happy at Easter?' He was such a serious little fellow, and now he's grown up, he's nineteen, and he's given all, his bright youth, his love of life, to his King and Country. His work has begun. 'O, lover of my life, O soldier-saint, no work begun shall ever pause for death!'" Then the tears fell.

It was the only time I have seen her cry. "That's from Browning, too," she said, brushing the tears away. "He understood. O, but I'm a silly old woman. I won't be sad at Easter. I never have been. Why, the flowers are all coming out, and the buds peeping, and the blossom glistening in the sun, and my boy in his brave new uniform has, I know, the light of spring and victory in his eyes. All the world is beginning life anew after that illusion we call death, or winter." She looked up towards the light and suddenly she seemed initiate as she

uttered the great words that sanctify the Bright Day. "*Surrexit*, He is risen. *Vere surrexit*, He is risen indeed."

"If only I could see it all again," she said presently. "This re-birth of the world which I feel in my heart, see again one unforgettable sight like those lambs my boy and I watched frisking in the sun at Winchelsea. But I must stay at home. My friends are my eyes. Now, you have been in the country, where my boy was stationed, you have felt the spring, tell me what you have seen of the re-birth of the world, tell me what has left the most vivid impression upon you; tell me the unforgettable sight that I may cherish it this Easter."

"One day was a day of sunshine," I began, "clear and pure, and the blossom, rather scanty, was pink against the blue sky, and on the bare trees there were little clumps of swelling green buds. The beds were ablaze with crocuses, and beyond the hedge were pale primroses, and the golden celandine,

and if the snowdrops had gone, the bluebells were now beginning to promise their beauty. Oh, the violets were already peeping out! We were standing in the garden watching a heron flying high over the pond by the wood, when we heard the sound of guns——.”

“No, no, not that,” she said, “not killing, not that, tell me of birds, of the promise of spring, of a world new-risen with revived hopes—show me the unforgettable sight——.”

“We heard the sound of firing, and soon we saw the soldiers coming over the hill, swinging down the white road. We went to meet them, we thought your boy might be among them—and he was!”

“Ah!”

“We watched them approach. They had been singing *Tipperary*, but as they drew near, the chorus ceased, there was a pause, nothing but the shuffling of feet, then someone struck up ‘John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave, But his soul goes marching on.’ They all joined in. We raised our hats and

—and, oh it was wonderful! I realised it all, felt the whole meaning, this consecrated company, these soldiers of Christ, fighting the good fight for an Ideal, and your boy was among them. His face was transfigured. That was the unforgettable sight.”

“Yes, yes,” she murmured, “I am content, so content. Nothing is lost. God keep them, and bring them home again. All is well. The season of re-birth is with us. We may sometimes think that all grows drear in spite of the sunshine——.” She checked herself, turned to the poem, and read aloud in a firm voice:

But Easter-Day breaks. But
Christ rises. Mercy every way
Is infinite—and who can say?

“Browning greeted the Unseen with a cheer. So will I, so will we. My boy is mine for evermore. The risen cannot fall. The deathless cannot die. *Surrexit.*”

“*Vere surrexit.*”

CHAPTER XIII

THE WHELPS

WE were seated round the fire discussing the inevitable subject. But we had made a compact. Our war talk should be only of things that are encouraging and helpful. So much at least we—safe, snug, and warm—could do. From our fireside would pass out into the world invisible rays of fortitude; of pride and trust in wise rulers; in devoted civilians; in our glorious soldiers and sailors—and in the whelps. At first we called them our chicks, and I imagined a patriotic cartoon showing the old bird suddenly finding herself in trouble, beset by enemies—and, you know what happened, the chicks flying home across the seas from all parts of the world to rally round her.

The rumour that the old Mother was in trouble was enough for them—the chicks renounced at once their pursuits and pastimes, and flocked home—such big, gallant chicks.

But Miggles (she has always been called Miggles after a famous and dear character in fiction), who was trying not to cry tears of pride which were half joy and half sorrow, complained that she didn't like the idea of the old bird and her chicks. "They're lion whelps," she said, "not chicks. They heard the old lion roar, and they came. It was the call of the blood."

So we named them the whelps, and we hymned them as we sat patiently waiting for our whelps, three brothers, one of whom had married a daughter of our host. They were coming in their khaki to say *au revoir*. Alas, there is no word in English which whispers—"We'll come back soon, and all will be well." So we waited and talked of the great family of whelps from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Newfoundland, and South Africa;

from all lands where the hardy English have penetrated—those whelps, some rich, some poor, some dark, some fair, all of the blood, clear-eyed, defiant, who bring the air of the open and the stride of free men into muggy London town. Sometimes when I meet them in Victoria Street, I think for the moment that I am on the prairie.

We talked proudly of the whelps; but after a while our hostess, who is a Londoner born, and who had been rather silent, said: "But don't forget our London boys—the boys of Pimlico, and Hoxton, and Streatham, and Highgate, and everywhere, who rushed to help when the old lion first began to lash his tail. He found that he was a little stiff in the joints when he shook himself; but he soon showed that he was as game and as strong as ever. Don't forget our London boys who helped him to his feet."

No, we did not forget them. Yet we were silent, for not one of us but ached for the loss of a London boy, and at the thought of all

that was left—just a little cross in Flanders, Gallipoli, or Mesopotamia, or some spot on the great waters, never to be located, but never to be forgotten. We were silent.

Presently I told them the tale of the two London boys and the Gallipoli blizzard, a sad tale, but the simple splendour of it outsoars the sadness. It was the fifth day of the great blizzard and frost at Suvla. Men came in, reported the medical officer, frozen to the knees, some with gangrene. Many were mere boys, but they had refused to leave the trenches until reinforcements arrived. One morning, a Newfoundlander, in a trench near by, drew the attention of the medical officer to two figures in a ditch out by the Salt Lake. The officer called a stretcher party, and they found two lads of the City of London Regiment sitting in the ditch frozen and dead. One of the lads had his arms around the other, and he was holding pieces of biscuit to his companion's mouth.

We were silent. We could not speak, and

while we sat thus, looking down, the three whelps entered, grand in their new uniforms, and one said—"Holloa, is this a funeral?" They judged by our faces; they could not see the pride and glory in our hearts because we belonged to the Anglo-Saxon race. We admired their uniforms, debated kit topics, and told cheerful stories, for nobody wanted to break down, and we wished to send the whelps off with happy memories.

When they had gone I began thinking of the Britons, who, for some centuries, have scattered over the globe. They are the sires, grandsires, ancestors of our whelps. Then I remembered the forty-niners in California, and the days of my youth, when Bret Harte's stories, revealing a free, fresh life, brimming with humour, pathos, and the sense of sacrifice, seemed to me, as a boy, sublime. Obsessed by the dream I rose and drew from the bookshelf the volume of Bret Harte's stories.

Aloud I read passages from the four masterpieces—*Tennessee's Partner*, *The Luck of*

Roaring Camp, The Outcasts of Poker Flat, and *Miggles*, wherein are enshrined types of the fearless, philosophical, humorous, straight British ancestors of our dear whelps. Glad was I to recover from the past dear Mliss, and best of all, the loyal, loving, and unparalleled Miggles.

While our Miggles tried to dissemble, I thought of another wanderer, a Scot, this time, R.L.S., who, far, far away from home wrote of his wife:

Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble dew,
Steel-true and blade-straight,
The great artificer
Made my mate.

I said these lines over to myself as we made our way home through the darkened streets, and I dreamed that night of all they meant, and of Tennessee's Partner, and of Miggles, and of whelps so big that they could not stand upright in a motor-bus, and who always called England—home.

Next day we met two more whelps. The encounter stirred us to joy. The first sat opposite to me at a luncheon party in Westminster. He was a young Lieutenant, fair, with an eye like the flash of a sword, who quoted Michael Drayton, and was familiar with Froissart, and who regarded London as the most entrancing place in the world. "Where do you come from?" I asked him afterwards, shuffling my chair alongside his. He told me that he is a South African, English father, Dutch mother, and that he had worked his passage to Tilbury docks as assistant purser. And why had he come? "O, you know the old country wanted—you understand." Yes, I understood. The mother-father lion was bothered, and the whelp hastened to her aid.

I told this to Miggles as we roamed about Westminster afterwards. "I'd love to adopt a whelp," she said, tearfully. "All right," said I, "but choose one who is not more than six foot six inches high."

"Here's a batch to select from," I remarked, as towards us from the direction of the Embankment Garden came four soldiers, privates, magnificent, laden, mud-stained, fresh from the trenches. As they approached, one of them, who was walking lame, lagged behind. His companions crossed the road and hastened towards the Square. The lame man hobbled towards us, and as he passed I noticed on his epaulette the word "Canada." Private Something of Canada had gone a dozen yards away when Miggles cried: "Can't we do something for him? Do let me try!" She ran after him. I followed leisurely to discover her pressing upon him offers of assistance. "There's a delightful Soldiers' Club at Victoria," she was saying, "where you can get a really good meal for a few pence." "Thank you so much," he said. "I appreciate your kindness, madam." His manner was courteous, his accent that of an educated man, but there was a tiny twinkle of amusement in his eyes, and I

noticed that he wore on his little finger a fine signet ring.

But Miggles would not be denied. She plied him with offers of help and questions. Yes, he had come from the trenches that morning: a three-months-old wound in his leg was troubling him a little, but it was of no consequence; he had been in London before, knew it rather well.

His eyes roamed up, up, the House of the Mother of Parliaments. "That's wonderful," he said.

"It stands for Freedom—it's worth fighting for," cried Miggles.

"Yes," said the soldier, quietly, "it's worth fighting for."

"And are you sure," continued Miggles, "that we can't do anything for you? Couldn't we find you a nice little hotel, and drive you there?" looking furtively at his lame leg.

"Thanks so much," said the Canadian Private; "my friends have just gone on to

find a cab, and—and we've already engaged rooms at the Ritz."

We resumed our walk, and I said gently to Miggles: "When you propose to adopt a whelp you'd better make sure that he's not a millionaire."

CHAPTER XIV

ENDURING TO THE END

I ASSOCIATE Uncle John with the walk, and the walk with Uncle John. He is the genius of that green place in mid-London where thrushes sing, herons doze, rabbits nibble, and a waterfall sprinkles the shrubs.

I salute the veteran. Uncle John, civilian, is a gallant son of England. Broken in health, his son gone, his wife a memory, this ageing man is enduring to the end. Unconquered by time and disaster, he is worthy sire of his soldier-boy who died with a laugh and a shout, without a pang, shot in the throat as he leapt into the enemy's trench. The father remains—"sticking it." Once a rationalist, now a mystic, the change so slow, the awakening so delicate, he endures,

I believe, I am sure, as seeing Him who is invisible. Valiant to the end, we are helped by the tireless patience and unfaltering faith of this ill, ageing man, known to many soldiers as Uncle John.

That walk—such a little walk! You may approach it spaciouly from Marble Arch; you may reach it quickly through that flagged lane in Knightsbridge called Park Place. Either way leads to the East bridge over the Serpentine, the beginning and the end of that sanctified walk. Wonderful sights may be seen! There are days when, as you lean on the parapet, and look westward over the wide, curving water (moist twilights in the clearing after rain for choice), water and sky seem to lead to Infinity. The dim trees in the distance, bordering the grey water, help the illusion, and reveal to us the Open Gate, which Claude and Turner brought into art, and which must always stir in man immortal longings.

This is the sight that Uncle John sees at

the hour of sundown—his hour of relaxation. For his days are rigorously devoted to “doing his bit.” He makes bandages; he sandpapers splints; he cuts ham sandwiches three nights a week at a soldiers’ club; he composes and prints at his own cost leaflets which he calls *Wargains*; and, best of all, he takes wounded soldiers on this little walk at sundown—where thrushes sing.

He leads them, some hobbling, some stump-
ing on one leg and a crutch, through Park
Place, across the Row, and so to the East
Bridge. There they pause; they lean over
the parapet; their eyes, still harbouring the
dread sights of war, look beyond the water,
absorbing that sweet, fresh solitude of peace,
and Uncle John talks of——.

No, I must not repeat his talk. He is
very wise, and although in his great heart
there is a burning desire to tell these boys of
the righteous and noble cause for which they
are fighting; that he who endures to the end
shall save himself, his friends, and his land,

Uncle John does not sermonize them. He is wise. He talks history; he tells the boys the curious tale of the Serpentine Lake, the lost Westbourne brook which feeds the lake, its hidden springs and outflowings to the other waters of the Royal Parks; he speaks of the birds, how he has seen a blue tit here, and a flock of chaffinches yonder; he tells of the dead, the great and the good, makers of England, who have crossed this bridge; he reminds these soldier-boys that they stand there in the heart of our England; he indicates Whitehall, Kensington, Westminster, hallowed by memories, our splendid heritage, placed in our charge—"and that's the old land you're fighting for, boys, fighting so that your children may come into it free and unfettered, clean and confident, as we did. Keep the old flag flying!" And into the clear eyes of his hearers comes a look that is good to see. They are of the old British stock, men who drew the bow, and sailed the seas, and feared nothing. I turn away, for

my eyes are dimmed with pride and gladness that I am British born.

Then the walk begins. They cross the bridge to the north. Uncle John stops before the inscription which tells how Edward the Confessor gave the manor of Hyde to the Abbey of Westminster, with a supply of pure water from a conduit which started at this spot. The group descends the path to the right, passing the pond where the grave herons stand, Uncle John talking all the while of England's past, her splendour, and her freedom; her flowers, birds, and trees that you may see in this odd, delightful little walk in the heart of London. Then they ascend to the right, and the brimming Serpentine is in view again, and the weeping ashes and the young shoots on the Daphne tree; so they come once more to the bridge and the parapet which faces the Open Gate. There they linger, somewhat tired, although it is such a little walk; but wounded soldiers are not athletes. Before they separate, Uncle John

murmurs, confidentially, a few sentences of simple, helpful talk, explaining the mystical meaning of such words as duty, endurance, consecration, faith, God; and he likes to give each of them a copy of one of his leaflets called *Wargains*. If the day be fine he will read them something from a dumpy khaki-covered note-book, which he calls *My Anthology*. One day when he read a poem, a soldier by my side, with one arm gone and a right leg in a sling, nodded his head, and said—"That's a bit o' alright. So's 'e." "True," I said, "Uncle John's all right. He's enduring to the end, against odds, and that isn't easy. Why do you call him Uncle John?"

The soldier rearranged the sling about his crippled leg, remarking to it, "Now, none o' your back talk," and said: "Why do we call 'im Uncle John? Well, it's like this. 'E told us once that John the Apostle, when he was a very old man—a deal older than Bobs was when he died—used to stand about in

market-places, always saying of the same thing, which was 'Little children, love one another.' We chaps tried to figure it out how you love and kill at the same time. We couldn't agree, so we asked 'im to tell us the story again, and my mate said that this Saint John must 'ave been like the old chap, so we called 'im John—that is, Uncle John, because John seemed too familiar like."

Came a day, a sunset clearing after rain, when something happened, which rounded off Uncle John's life into an episode final and unforgettable. He had been ill. It was the incurable, internal complaint that gave him constant discomfort and frequent pain; but the attacks only increased his activities. When I, watching the spasms of his face and limbs, offered sympathetic suggestions about taking it easier and nursing his perverse body, he answered, "No, when I sink I'll go down in full sail," and his frail form straightened itself, and in his eyes there was ecstasy. We were waiting by the parapet. We had gone

on together during one of the little walks, ahead of the group of wounded soldiers who had lingered trying to induce the solemnest of the herons to partake of a meal of bread and cheese. When they had overtaken us, Uncle John, withdrawing his khaki anthology from his pocket, said: "Boys, it's a rare evening—look at the sky! It's an evening to remember, and I want to read you something that you'll remember when you're—out there. It will help you." He had reached as far as "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me," when, suddenly, there was a commotion on the bridge, and there advanced towards us that sight of sights which no home-staying Englishman can look upon without emotion and exultation—a soldier fresh from the trenches—laden, stained, caked in mud, smiling.

He saluted and said: "Thought I should see you here, sir. Some of your boys asked me to find you and give you a message.

They want you to know that they're 'sticking it,' same as you are, and they say that they're better able to stick it for what you've told 'em, and because you believe in 'em. Any message, sir?" The soldier's hand went again to the salute. He waited as for orders.

We waited, too. I thanked God that I had been allowed to live for that moment. It was a long moment, because the old civilian's eyes had again sought the Open Gate. They rested there—seeing something. Then he turned to the mud-spattered soldier, and because he was pure in heart, and without guile, Uncle John said just two words, just the right words—those two words that in these days are as significant and uplifting as any two words in the language.

"Any message, sir?" repeated the mud-spattered soldier.

"Carry on," said Uncle John.

CHAPTER XV

TO ONE WHO WAS READY

I N the nave of Westminster Abbey, sunk in the floor, is a worn marble slab—a memorial to one of the Makers of England. On the slab is a plain cross, and beneath it are the words, “Be Ready.” Seeing that injunction and the cross, I thought of you, Soldier-Healer, and planned a letter which would form the epilogue to this little book; and I determined that the title should be “To One who was Ready.”

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I had chanced into the Abbey, with a French Canadian from the front, while the service of Intercession, which has been held there daily since the war began, was in pro-

gress. All around were the memorials of our "decent and dauntless race," silent witnesses, of whom we must be worthy. And I was conscious, Soldier-Healer, of a mystical communion with you, and with your men, so far away on a hillside in Salonica. Invisible, yet you were all visible to me.

When the service ended I sat, revolving many things too elusive for words, for with all of us feeling has become too deep and uncharted for mere words or speech to express it. Dumbly seeking relief, I went over in memory the unrealised happiness of the days before the war; then I pictured that fateful August of 1914, and all since. O, the mental and emotional experiences our dear English folk have passed through—pride, purification, fervour, sorrow, joy, apprehension, determination, wonder, loss, anxiety, gain, hope—and now all these pangs have solidified into a grim, glad resolution, common to all, in spite of the divergences of utterance of proud, free men—to endure to the

end. And to be ready for endurance as for triumph.

You were always ready! I see you in the years before the war, an ardent Territorial, snatching leisure from your professional duties, to drill and to train your men in military usages; but also in the arts of succouring and healing the wounded, the purpose and privilege of your corps. I recall the eve of the outbreak of war, when I sought your company, feeling the need of speech with one who would be facing the coming catastrophe with steady brain and strong heart. I found you "getting your kit together," arranging for the swift end of your civil life, and of your private professional work. All that was over until the war was over. You, and your wife, treated the cataclysm as a long foreseen and inevitable break in the pleasant run of life. You had discussed the coming of the break, made all your plans. So the day, the awful day, found you prepared—ready to act immediately, you as a soldier

healer at the front, she as a civilian healer at the base. You uttered no heroics, you sought no perferment, you set about your duty quietly. I thought of what Blake had once said: "I should be sorry if I had any earthly fame, for whatever natural glory a man has is so much detracted from his spiritual glory. I wish to do nothing for profit; I want nothing; I am quite happy."

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You disappeared. I picked you up from our army in the making again and again in the succeeding months—at barracks in London, at camps in Surrey, and Sussex, calm, confident, training your boys, and I am sure no unit went out to France more prepared, more willing for any sacrifice, so that England might be saved, and freedom established four-square against all assaults of the envious.

Then your letters began to arrive from somewhere in France—such letters, nothing about yourself, but always something about

your boys, your "blessed boys," their endurance, their gaiety, their sacrifice. O yes, we wrote much to each other about that wonderful dream come true called Sacrifice that has passed, angel-like, with finger on lip, over the land, uniting all, whatever their lives or beliefs, into the knowledge—inarticulate yet universal—that to give is to gain. To the Greeks it may have been foolishness, to the Jews a stumbling-block—to our land it has become everything. And I, elderly and ill, was wretched that I could not be with the boys fighting, or with you healing, in the midst of that hell. Someone from Verdun had written: "Only he, who has heaven in his heart, can withstand this hell." O those letters that come to us from the front. The faith of some of them is as water in a desert. O the faith of our boys in spite of that hell, and their clairvoyance about eternal things! It was M. Bordeaux—was it not?—who said, "Those who pray much are not always the worst informed."

One day there came for me a gleam of happiness, and an effort to accept my lot. You told me that an article of mine had helped you, helped some of your boys. And you asked for other messages. So I had the confidence to go on, and to gather them into a little book. Here it is, Soldier-Healer. My heart sends it. You will open it somewhere on that hillside in Salonica, whither you went without warning all "in the day's work," ready for anything, so long as your country asked.

England has always refused to be dispirited—so have you. And as just now I quoted what Blake, that great Englishman, so un-English, yet in essentials so greatly English, said about the individual, here I recall what a great American said of England: "I see her, not dispirited, not weak, but well remembering that she has seen dark days before; indeed, with a kind of instinct that she sees a little better in a cloudy day, and that in a storm of battle and calamity

she has a secret vigour and a pulse like a cannon." It is the knowledge of a just and righteous cause that gives England and gives you and your boys secret vigour and a pulse like a cannon; it is faith, which is insight, that enabled you, in days of happy peace, to be alert and ready for the pounce of the unrighteous.

I arise and return to the nave, to that old grey slab embedded in the floor. I see again the cross, and the injunction. "Be Ready," and I see in a vision that cross and those words as your crest and motto. So from this Temple of Silence and Reconciliation in ancient Westminster, to some new-born shanty church on a hillside in Salonica, there passes from me to you, old friend, the invisible banner that I have chosen for you, and for your boys—the cry, "Be Ready," and above it the eternal symbol of the Cross.

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Consoled I pass from the Abbey into the brisk life of Westminster, and as I reach the

street there swings by a troop of Bird Men known officially as The Flying Corps. None can look at them without elation—these buoyant youths so gay and gallant. Smiling and singing, they pass, leaving with us, who are watching, an augury of cheer and confidence. Seeing them, old friend, I send you another message, the cry of assurance sailormen use, the cry the poet heard in the night, the cry that rings in my heart to-day, and for all days, the cry—All's Well.

THE END

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